

RAILROADING in New Jersey

The LITTLE Lines

(New Jersey probably had a more important role in the establishment and development of railroads than any other state in the country. This article, the ninth of a series, deals with the short or branch lines which were set up to link outlying towns long before automobiles appear on the scene. This service opened up new areas not served by major lines and supplied an outlet for Jersey farm and mine products.)

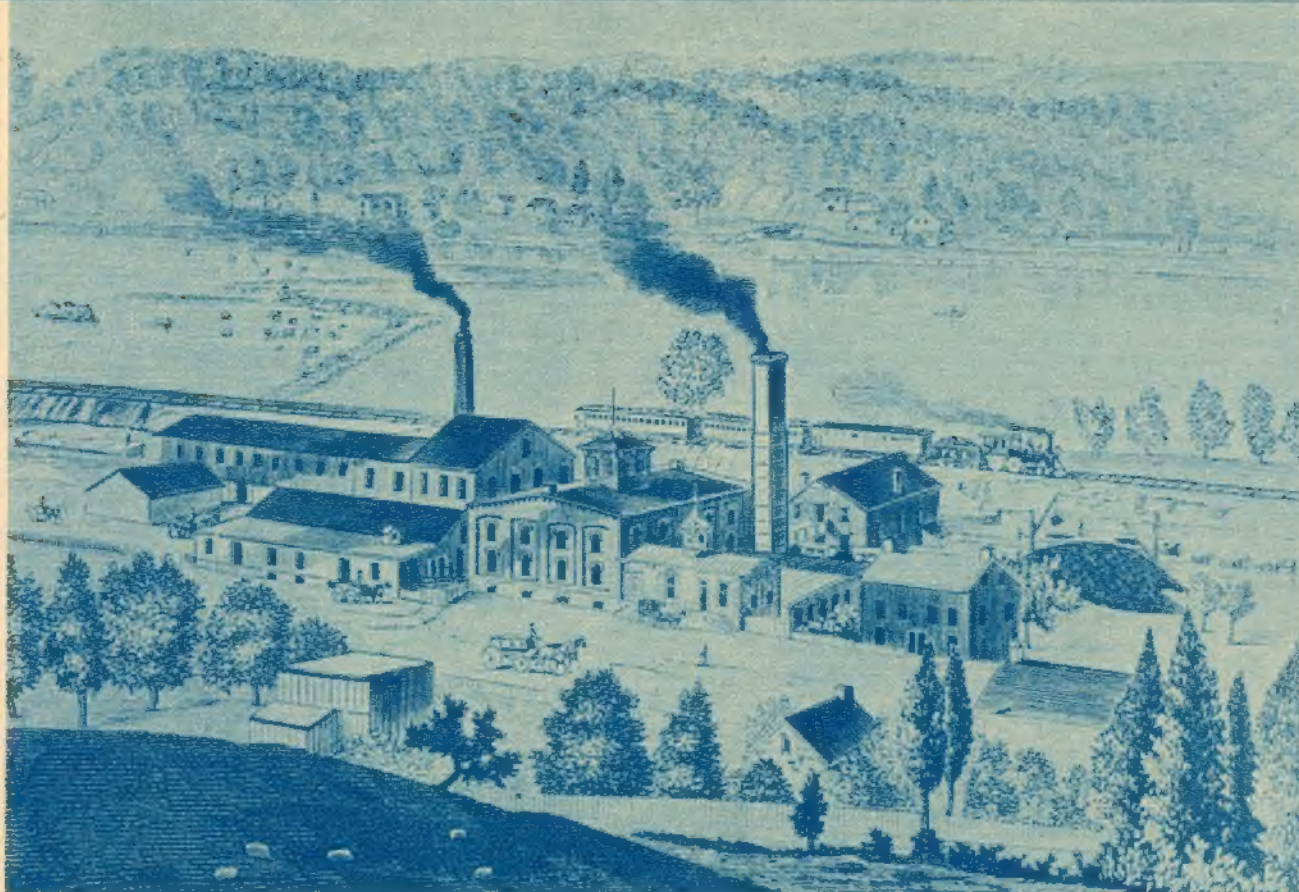
THE 19th Century howling and screaming about the railroads seldom got off the main lines. Let a locomotive jump the track on the Pennsylvania or a passenger train be late on the Lackawanna and indignant editors, legislators and commuters filled the air with anguished complaints.

Let the same things happen on one of the dozens of little lines stretching into the farmlands or the iron regions, however, and the general response was a chuckle and a shake of the head. The folks had a special love for their own little railroad!

Maybe it was the fact that many of them owned stock in the little line with its tea-kettle engines and its rusty tracks. Maybe it was the fact that many of them felt twinges of guilt because they didn't use the railroad as much as they had promised back in the days when they were demanding that it be built. At any rate they just forgave the little fellow for things which they felt really weren't his fault.

Demands for railroads to link towns like Newton or Peapack or Lambertville or Bloomfield with the Big City started soon after plans for major lines were made in the 1830s but the era of short line building didn't get fully underway until the 1850s.

MANY of the short lines collapsed quickly and many of them died lingering deaths. Some were swallowed up in larger systems and a handful survived to become important



Lambertville around 1880 with a Belvidere & Delaware train steaming past the India Rubber Works. Road's name was shortened to "Bel-Del" by valley people.

(Photo credits: Newark Public Library, Edward Weber, Thomas T. Taber and Thomas T. Taber III)

and successful in their own rights. Whatever their eventual fates, these "streaks o' rust" all had much in common, call them what you will—short lines, feeder lines, bridge lines or branch lines.

Generally the building of the connecting lines was in the tradition of what was good enough for grandfather is not good enough for me.

Wagons had sufficed

Above all, grandson was enthusiastic about his little community railroad.

HE reacted, for example, like the editor of The Hunterdon Gazette in 1854, the year the Belvidere-Delaware Railroad reached Belvidere after six years of building up the banks of the Delaware from Trenton. The editor wrote proudly:

the woodburning "Warren" pulled out on the main tracks with sparks shooting from its flaring stack, it was a proud day indeed for Lambertville.

The railroad also brought new vistas to the little river towns. A Hunterdon County paper of 1869 records a Saturday night in Frenchtown, where 83 people met the train.

Only four people got off, but who could tell when some

Railroad Fever Brought on Rash of Feeder Lines to Serve Jersey Towns Seeking Access to Markets for Products

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

grandfather in Hunterdon County to get his milk and cattle to market, but it wasn't good enough for grandson in 1850. Mules had been good enough to get grandfather's iron from the Morris and Sussex mines, but grandson wanted a railroad in 1870. Grandson also wanted a railroad to haul his peaches, to bring in his coal or take himself to his job in the city.

"At last the ears of our delighted population are greeted with the melodious sound of the steam whistle!"

The river population soon called their railroad the "Bel-Del" with deserved affection, because the line brought new prosperity to the rich valley.

It brought railroad shops to Lambertville, where in 1851 a locomotive, the "Warren" was built. When

Saturday night would bring a story-telling drummer from Philadelphia?

ENTHUSIASM for a railroad was also rife in Newton, when farmers heard at mid-Century that the big iron men, Cooper & Hewitt, were going to build the Andover Mine Railroad to haul their ore from Andover to Waterloo on the Morris Canal.

"Won't be much of a railroad, just a little mule line," Cooper & Hewitt insisted.

"How about if we raise \$100,000? Will you build it on up here and make it a steam line?" Newton folks asked.

Certainly. So the name was changed to the Sussex Railroad and on December 11, 1854, a crowd of 700 people gathered in the frosty Sussex County air to welcome the first locomotive to Newton. Booming cannon provided a fitting background for the congratulatory speeches by town notables.

NEWTON grew quickly. Within two years a town newspaper could report that for many months farm wagons had creaked into the town's freight station laden with farm products. Some days the line stretched all the way from the depot up Spring street to the court house!

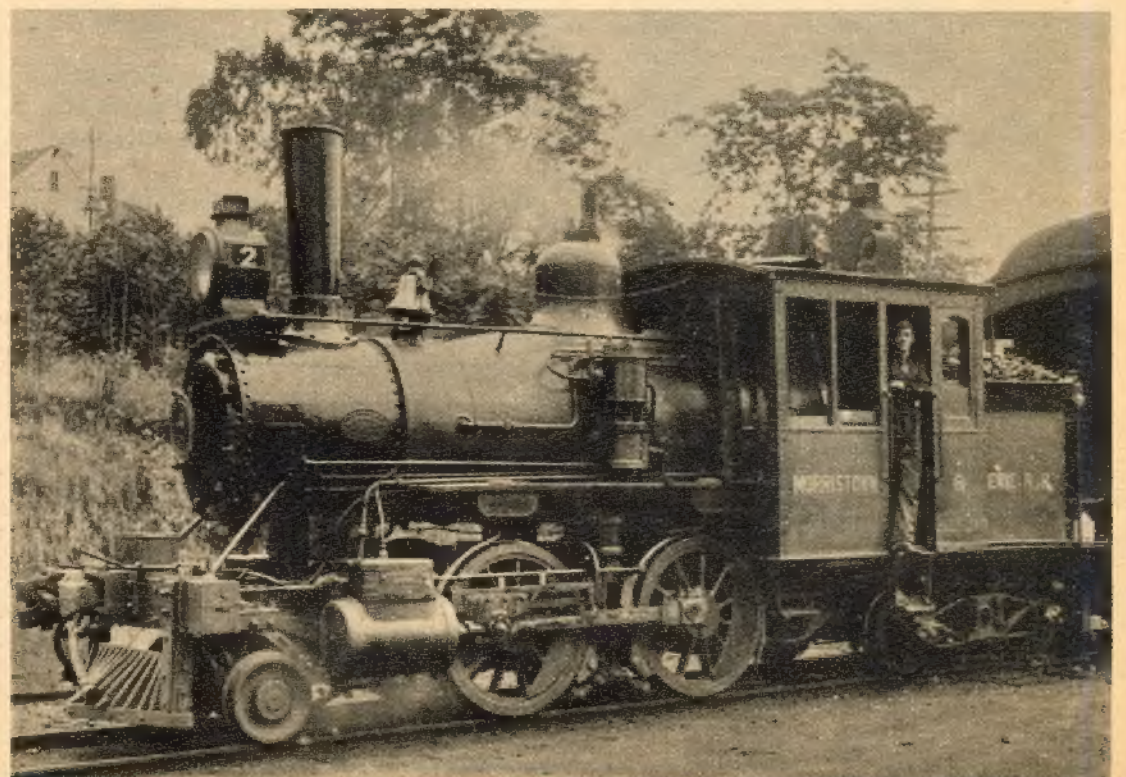
What's that again about enthusiasm for the "home" railroad? Take note of this: On January 24, 1857, when a heavy snow swirled huge drifts over the tracks, 80 Newton men set out to clean the tracks themselves! They worked southward to below Drake's Pond, where they met the railroad gang working up from Andover.

Sussex Railroad eventually lost its identity. First it spread outward itself, to Lafayette and Branchville and Franklin and McAfee, hauling heavy iron ore and limestone shipments. Late in the century the Lackawanna leased the line and built a cut-off to by-pass Waterloo and bring the tracks to a more direct connection at Netcong. Through trains thus could run from Franklin to Hoboken, without the necessity of locomotive changes at Waterloo.

The new route, incidentally, furnished a great source of amusement to the worldly young men of Dover. As the Sussex train stopped in town for water, the calves on flat-



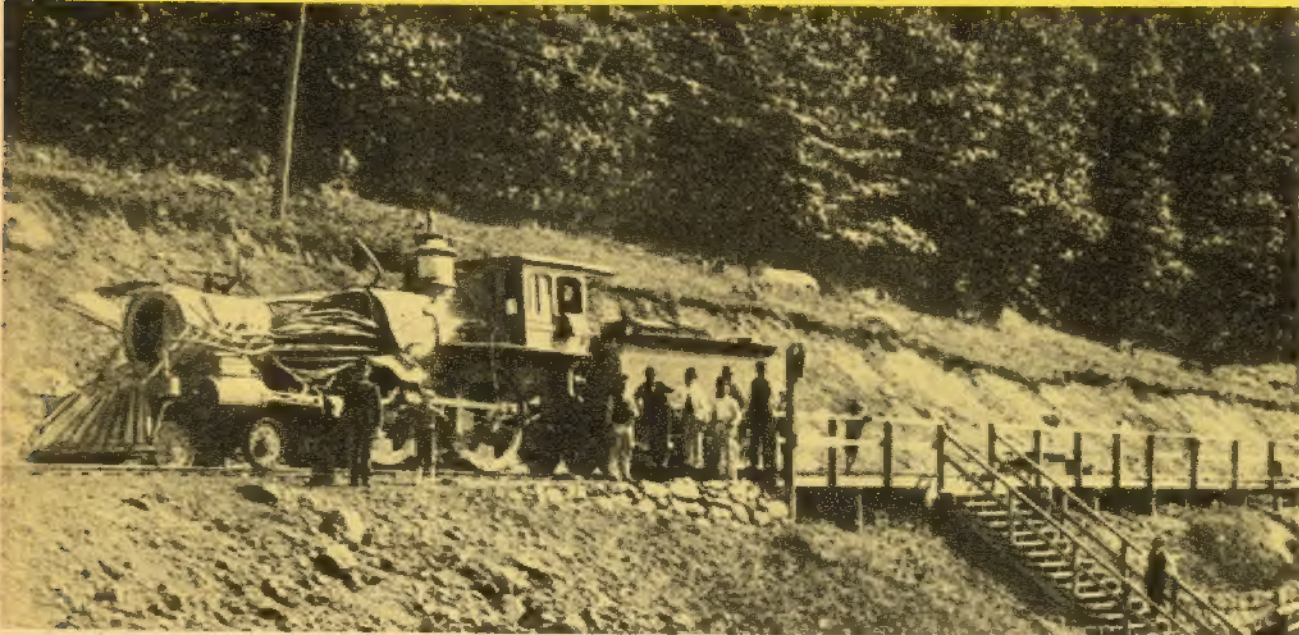
An early Raritan River R. R. locomotive photographed in 1898.



The "Peanut Roaster," one of the first Morristown & Erie engines.



Sussex Railroad's Engine No. 3, the "John I. Blair," named for the pioneer railroad builder, photographed in 1892 at Branchville Station. BELOW: Scene at Sussex line's Waterloo Station in 1890 when lack of water caused locomotive of an Easton mail train to explode. No one was injured in the blast which sent part of the engine boiler through the roof of the station on lower tracks.



cars would set up such a howl "that you could not make yourself heard."

"Here comes the Sussex band!" the Dover funny-men would yell, holding their sides in laughter.

A SOMEWHAT more restrained enthusiasm greeted the Newark and Bloomfield Railroad after it was finished to West Bloomfield (now Montclair) in 1856. One car was more than enough to handle all the passenger traffic. At the end of six months the railroad sadly reported a deficit of \$330.

The Newark and Bloomfield had twin destinies—it was to grow into a vital line through one of the state's prime commuting areas and it was certain from the start that it would become a part of the Morris & Essex (Lackawanna) system. The latter took place officially in April, 1868.

Railroad fever did bring

about one important change in the area—the establishment of Montclair as a separate municipality.

It seems that West Bloomfield demanded better rail service in 1867. Bloomfield refused to face the possibility of bankruptcy to help build another railroad. Town fathers said: "Let West Bloomfield get out and build its own railroad if it wants one so badly."

West Bloomfield did just that in 1868, seceding to set up Montclair Township. The Montclair Railroad, an independent line, was built at a cost of \$4,000,000—enough to threaten the collapse of the rural township after the panic of 1873 seemed certain to ruin the new line. However, the railroad became part of the Erie's Greenwood Lake branch, and the township and its railroad grew simultaneously.

At Montclair, the original Newark & Bloomfield Rail-

road depot "looked like what you would expect to see in a mining town built overnight." The station master and his wife lived in one end and if ever there was a man with multiple jobs it was the station master. He was typical, incidentally, of station masters on short lines everywhere.

First he sold tickets. Then he would jump aboard the train and act as brakeman to Newark. Between trains he was telegraph operator, express agent, freight agent, general manager and confidant of the men and boys who gathered in the station.

Down the line, in Glen Ridge (then known as Ridgewood), the station master did everything the Montclair man did and then some—he was also postmaster, barber and dentist. Later he was also responsible for getting the station cleaned up for the Sunday evening church serv-

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Rahway Valley Railroad viewed from Overlook Mountain, Summit, around 1905.

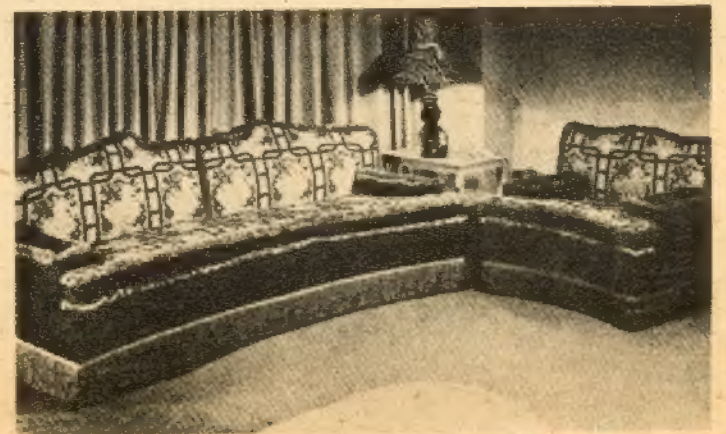


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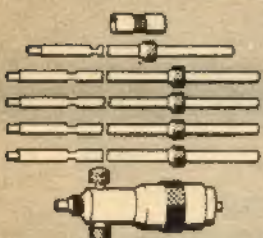
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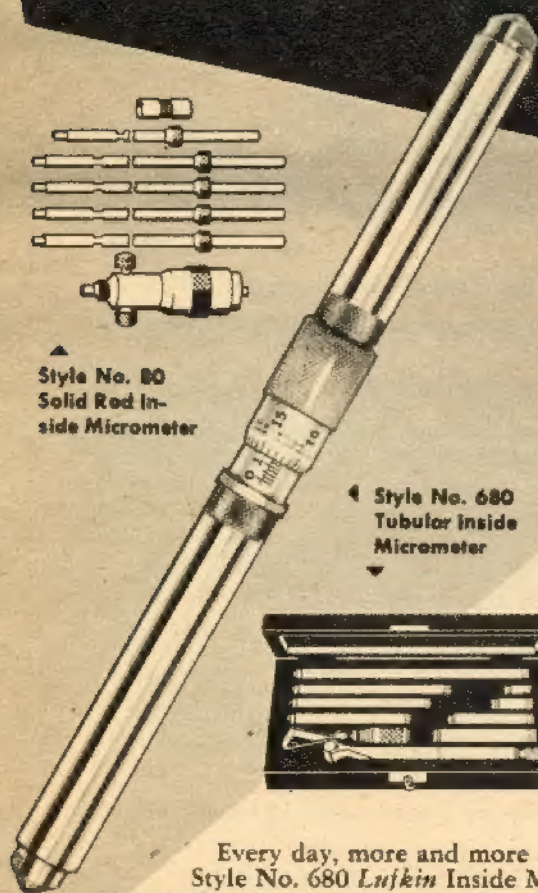
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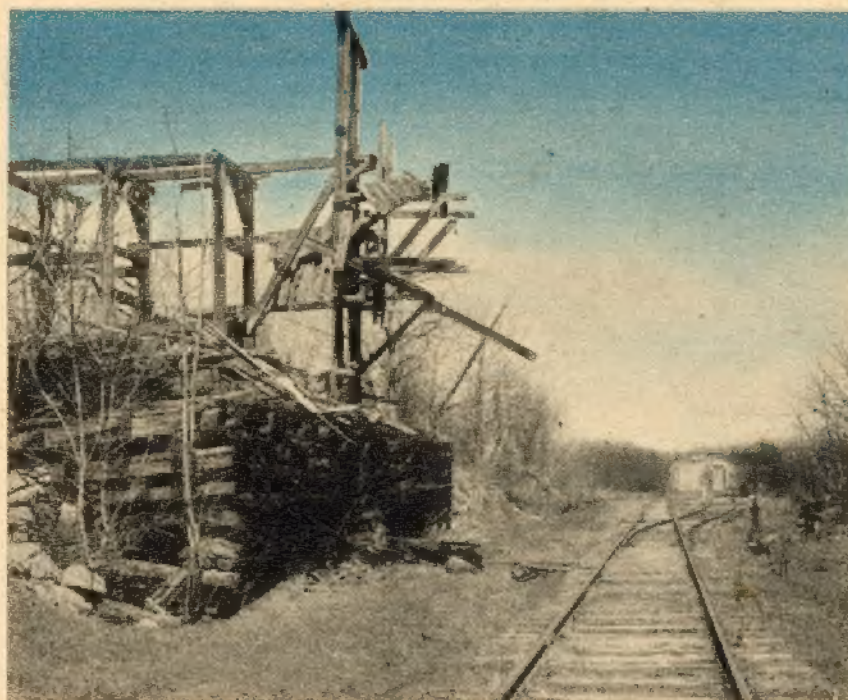


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ABOVE: Cars loaded with
iron ore are taken in tow
by engine of Ogden Mine
Railroad. The little line,
operating over a 10-mile
stretch of rugged mountain
country from Norman Hill
to Nolan's Point, was com-
pleted in 1866 and pros-
pered for about 20 years.



LEFT: Remains of the rail-
road's tracks before they
were ripped up for World
War II scrap drive. At
left is loading platform
built in 1891 when mines
were reopened by Thomas
A. Edison who sank an es-
timated \$2,500,000 into
the venture before mines
closed for good in 1898.

(Cont'd from Preceding Page)
ices held in the station from
January, 1878, and for many
years after.

At the same time Bloom-
field and Montclair were war-
ring another little line was
being built, this one stretch-
ing from Nolan's Point at the
northern end of Lake Hopat-
cong up through rugged
mountain country to iron
mines at Norman Hill, near
Ogdensburg. The 10-mile
stretch of track known as
Ogden Mine Railroad was
completed in 1866 and for two
decades it prospered.

HUNDREDS of tons of iron
ore were taken out of the
mines in a day and trundled
down to Nolan's Point to be
loaded aboard a puffing
sternwheeler on Lake Hopat-
cong for transshipment to
the Morris Canal.

Discovery of rich iron de-
posits in the Lake Superior
region sounded the death
knell of the mine in 1888, but
three years later Thomas A.
Edison bought the mineral

rights and once again iron ore
traveled over the Ogden Mine
Railroad. Edison sank an
estimated \$2,500,000 into the
mine before the mine was
closed for good in 1898.

Passenger trains continued
to run in desultory fashion,
and for many years the rail-
road gained a thin livelihood
from trains which hauled ice
from Lake Weown and coal to
the villages along the way. It
disappeared forever into the
limbo of legend when its
tracks were ripped up in a
World War II scrap drive.

Iron fathered that railroad
failure, but dairy products
proved a stronger progenitor
of a Sussex County railroad
which stretched rapidly
across the northwestern part
of the state in the early 80s.
That was the Lehigh & Hud-
son River, today one of the
nation's most important
bridge lines.

The L. & H. R. started in

New York State in 1860 as
the Warwick Valley Railroad,
but in 1880 it extended into
New Jersey to tap the lime
kilns at McAfee. The fol-
lowing year its tracks ex-
tended to Belvidere and by
1890 it was complete from
Easton to Maybrook (N. Y.),
using 13 miles of Belvidere-
Delaware to go from Belvi-
dere to Phillipsburg.

Milk at first accounted for
60 per cent of the Lehigh &
Hudson River's gross reve-
nue, but agricultural revenues
diminished when the single
track line's importance grew
as a bridge line between the
South and New England, via
Maybrook, N. Y., and the
Poughkeepsie Bridge.

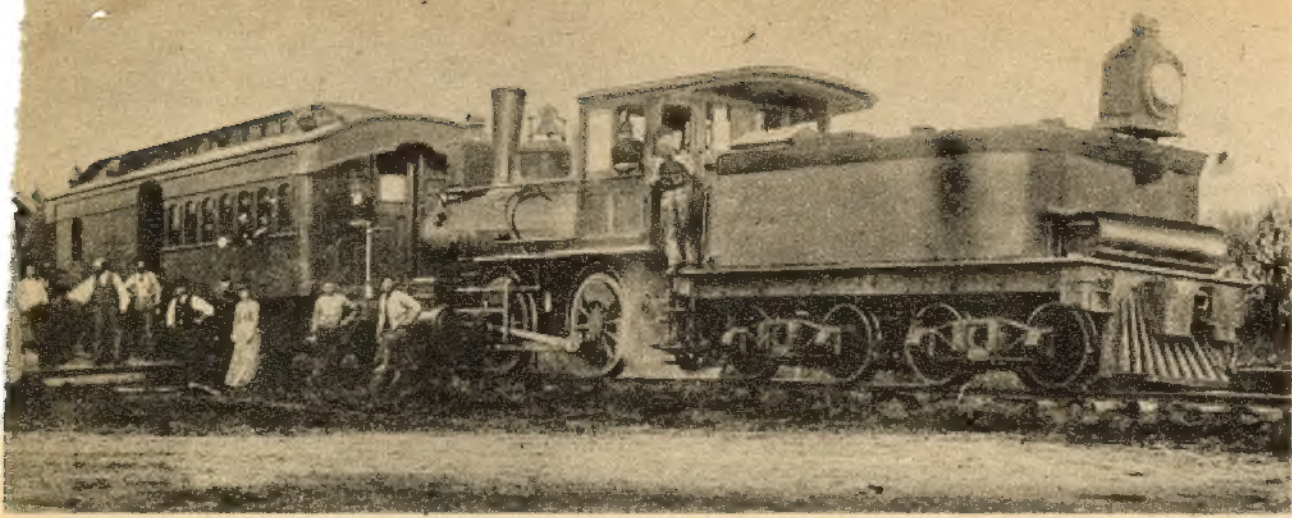
Late in the 1880s another
of today's vital bridge line,
the Lehigh & New England,
was built across Sussex
County, a few miles west
from the Lehigh & Hudson
River. It was known in its
early days as the Pennsyl-
vania, Poughkeepsie and
Boston Railroad, which sug-
gests rather obviously its
prime function — to carry
freight from Pennsylvania to
Boston via the Poughkeepsie
bridge.

The railroad's initials,
P. P. & B., led to the nick-
name, "Pickles, Pork &
Beans," which stuck to the
line for many years.

POSSIBLY the most famous
of all North Jersey short lines
was the Rockaway Valley,
whose nickname, "The Rocka-
bye Baby" points up the
amiable regard which the
folks from Morristown to
Whitehouse held for that
magnificent failure. The re-
gard grows, of course, in
direct proportion to the num-



An Erie locomotive and crew of commuter train
on tracks of Morristown & Erie around 1905.



ABOVE: "Rachael" No. 3 and the combination passenger coach and baggage car of the Rockaway Valley Railroad at Pottersville in 1893. Nicknamed "The Rockabye Baby," line was formed in 1888 to haul output of Hunterdon County peach orchards to market.

RIGHT: Horse-drawn carriage and wagon waiting for passengers and freight at the "Baby's" Watnong station, near Morristown. The line changed hands 12 times in 25 years, losing money for all owners except the last who junked the rails during World War I for over \$100,000.



—THE LITTLE LINES

ber of years the comic opera railroad has been out of existence.

The "Baby" was born in the blizzard of 1888 and its fundamental purpose was to carry peaches to market. It ran over a meandering, poorly-built right-of-way to a spot a mile from a Morristown connection with the Lackawanna. It was doomed to a lingering death when the San Jose scale destroyed Hunterdon County peach trees about 1895.

After losing hundreds of thousands of dollars (in the days when those sums amounted to something) the "Baby" was declared officially dead in 1913.

Ironically, the last owner of the railroad ripped up the rails during World War I and sold them as junk for over \$100,000—and became the only person ever to make money on the line!

Contemporaries of the Rockaway Valley fiasco were the highly-successful Morristown & Erie and the Rahway Valley, both started in the middle '90s and both known in 1951 as prime money makers.

WHIPPANY paper mills led to the building of the Whippany River Railroad from Morristown to Whippany in 1895. It was extended to Essex Fells and a junction with the Erie in 1903, when it became the Morristown & Erie. In all its 55 years of existence the little 11-mile line has never been in the red.

Morristown & Erie's passenger problems can be cited

as similar to those which faced any of the shorter lines. At first such traffic was good, because there was no other reasonably fast way to get to town, but the automobile forced receipts down to a point where it cost the railroad \$35 a day to maintain passenger trains. At one time, however, as many as seven trains ran through daily for commuters from Morristown to New York via the Erie.

At first the Morristown & Erie passenger cars were hauled by a little "peanut roaster" engine — which abided by a strict rule not to take on or discharge passengers anywhere but at a station or a cross road. A crossroad was "anything from a cowpath up"—and since the train often crept along at one mile per hour, the saying grew that "any one who couldn't get on anywhere along the route just wasn't eager to ride."

THE Rahway Valley hasn't always been a money-maker, but it has earned dividends since 1932 and gives every evidence of continuing to earn good money for its investors. The little 11-mile line was started in 1894 as a four-mile link between New Orange (now Kenilworth) and the Lehigh Valley and Jersey Central tracks at Aldene. An extension northwest to Summit on the Lackawanna was provided for in the charter but lack of funds quickly stopped further building.

Along came Louis Keller in 1904 to perk up the railroad. Most old-timers say Keller

went into the railroad business because he wanted to give himself and his golfing friends easy access to Baltusrol Golf Club near Summit. At any rate, Keller, publisher of the "Social Register," pushed the line past the golf club to the Lackawanna in Summit. Permanent connection was denied him, however, and it wasn't made until 1931—the year before dividends started, significantly enough.

New Jersey's short lines had a spurt of unusual business 35 to 40 years ago, particularly the Rahway Valley and the Raritan River (from New Brunswick to South River), when movie companies used the lines to film train wrecks for the serial "thrillers" of the day.

MANY still remember a day in 1914 when a Raritan River train was run out on a specially prepared trestle near Parlin. The trestle was blown up and the train plunged into the creek to provide a sequence over which Pearl White, Johnny Hines and Antonio Moreno showed proper screen anguish.

Ten years later the Rahway Valley's turn came and for months the line was turned into a "Wild West" route, with celluloid cowboys shooting and stomping up and down the line. The climax came one day when the film folk put too much dynamite in a prop building they were to blow up.

The blast blew out every window in the Kenilworth station, sent four actors to the hospital and ended forever the movie making on the Rahway Valley—much to the regret of the railroad hands, who got \$1 a day and all the beer they could imbibe.

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